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NASIS

NEBRASKANS AND EDUCATIONAL PLURALISM

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NEBRASKA ANNUAL SOCIAL INDICATORS SURVEY

Bureau of Sociological Research
Department of Sociology
University of Nebraska–Lincoln
Lincoln, Nebraska 68588
Telephone: (402) 472-3672

NASIS-80 #7

NEBRASKANS AND EDUCATIONAL PLURALISM

Helen Moore
Department of Sociology

Price: $1.00

The Nebraska Annual Social Indicators Survey

Lynn K. White - 1980 Study Director

The findings in this report are based on data collected in the fourth Nebraska Annual Social Indicators Survey (NASIS). This survey is part of an on-going study of the quality of life in Nebraska conducted by the Bureau of Sociological Research at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

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The interview averaged approximately 45 minutes and included questions about environment, health, crime, political attitudes, occupation, education, family life, and other matters reflecting the quality of life experienced in the state. For the entire sample, the chances are 95 in 100 that the true value for the population lies within a range equal to the reported survey percentage plus or minus 2.3 percent. This is an estimate of maximum error and for most items the percentages are likely to be even more accurate.

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NEBRASKANS AND EDUCATIONAL PLURALISM

Over seventy years ago, John Dewey and other reformers envisioned an American educational democracy which would respond to the waves of immigrants arriving on eastern and western shores. The public school system was to create a "democratic dialogue of communities" focused on the "improvement of society."* Policy makers of the time were as committed then to the public school system as a solution to the "problem" of ethnic and racial diversity as they are today.

Dewey's vision of a plurality of cultural and ethnic communities within one school system was challenged by other educational programs. Educational historian Elwood P. Cubberly argued that "popular education has everywhere been made more difficult by (ethnic minority) presence... and our national life has been afflicted with a serious case of racial indigestion." He, like other public officials, encouraged strict conformity to Anglo-Saxon traditions of education, culture, law, government and morality.* A more moderate alternative suggested was the popularized philosophy of the school as a "melting pot." Here the ethnic problem was interpreted as fusing "...these elements into one common nationality, having one language, one political practice and one ideal of social development."*

* Quoted in Seymour W. Itzkoff Cultural Pluralism and American Education. Pennsylvania: International Textbook Company. 1970.

Education plays a critical role in determining the status of racial and ethnic minorities in Nebraska, a role that has become increasingly important in recent decades. Issues of desegregation and multi-cultural curriculum are contemporary reflections of the racial and ethnic diversity that continues in the state of Nebraska. As Nebraskans turn to their educational system as a part of the solution to this diversity, it is important to know the attitudes of people toward educational pluralism: do they favor educational diversity in curriculum? Should students with different skill levels attend the same classes? What is the extent of attention that should be paid to ethnic and racial issues? What support exists for current policies to desegregate large urban educational systems as a solution to equal educational opportunity?

The 1980 Nebraska Annual Social Indicators Survey provided an opportunity to receive answers to some questions about these educational attitudes among Nebraskans. We are specifically concerned with attitudes toward educational pluralism and the relationship of these to racial desegregation. Additionally, we describe some factors (race, ethnicity, educational degree, age and residence) which are associated with attitudes toward pluralism and desegregation.

MEASUREMENT

The Nebraska Annual Social Indicators Survey provides information on the attitudes and backgrounds of a representative sample of 1,916 adults living within the state. Attitudes toward educational pluralism

in the schools were obtained through a series of four questions. Respondents indicated whether they agreed or disagreed with each of the following statements: 1) classroom rules should take into account the cultural background of the child; 2) children learn best when bright students are mixed with the less advanced; 3) classroom discussion of racial problems is unsuitable for elementary school students and 4) the school curriculum needs major revisions if it is to meet the needs of minority students.

FINDINGS

Support for Educational Pluralism

The distribution of responses to the educational pluralism items is displayed in Table 1.1. A single scale was created by assigning a score of "1" to each response in agreement with statements 1, 2 and 4 and for disagreement with statement 3. Scores on the educational pluralism scale ranged from 0 to 4 with a high score indicating agreement with pluralism in the schooling processes.

TABLE 1.1

DISTRIBUTION OF RESPONSES TO EDUCATIONAL PLURALISM QUESTIONS

	% Agree	% Disagree	% Don't Know	Total N
Classroom rules should take into account the cultural background of the child.	63.1	26.6	10.3	1909
Children learn best when bright students are mixed with less advanced.	52.1	36.8	11.1	1908
Classroom discussion of racial problems is unsuitable for elementary school students.	24.8	64.0	11.2	1907
The school curriculum needs major revisions if it is to meet the needs of minority students.	45.6	33.0	21.4	1904

TABLE 1.2

DISTRUBUTION OF EDUCATIONAL PLURALISM SCALE SCORES

Number of responses in Agreement with Educational Pluralism	%	N
0	7.2	138
1	17.8	341
2	30.5	585
3	30.7	589
4	13.0	250

An indicator of support for school desegregation was also collected. Respondents were asked to indicate whether they agreed or disagreed with the following statement: programs to improve minority and low income neighborhood schools would be better than integrating schools to provide equal educational opportunity. In addition, we obtained background information about the individual respondents. The relationship between educational level, age and rural/urban residence to attitudes about cultural pluralism and school desegregation was examined.

Educational Pluralism and Desegregation

For the total sample of Nebraskans, we found that greater than 74 percent agreed with two or more of the items on the educational pluralism scale, showing strong support for educational attention to cultural and skill differences within the classroom. An additional 17.8 percent showed agreement with at least one item, while only 7.2 percent disagreed with all of the pluralism indicators. In general, Nebraskans support a model of educational democracy similar to that envisioned by Dewey.

Data from the survey also show that Nebraskans strongly prefer the strengthening of neighborhood schools as a program for educational equality for minority students. Sixty-seven percent of respondents agreed that improving low income and minority schools would be better than integrating schools to achieve equal educational opportunity.

TABLE 1.3

DISTRIBUTION OF RESPONSES TO NEIGHBORHOOD SCHOOL PREFERENCE QUESTION

	% Agree	% Disagree	% Don't Know	Total N
Programs to improve minority and low income neighborhood schools would be better than integrating schools to provide equal educational opportunity.	67.2	18.6	13.5	1902

Thus, the evidence for support of Dewey's cultural and academic democracy is decidedly mixed. While many people do support ethnic diversity in school curriculum and a mixing of students with diverse skills there is no significant support for desegregating schools to achieve equal educational opportunity. The data indicate that desegregation and educational pluralism are two separate educational policy issues to Nebraskans.

Effects of Race/Ethnicity

Nebraska's minority ethnic and racial population represents less than 4 percent of the state population. In Table 2.1, we describe the relationship between race/ethnicity and support for educational pluralism. As expected, it is among Hispanic and Black respondents that support for pluralism is strongest. White/Caucasian respondents had lower average scores than either Hispanics or Blacks. In spite of the small number of minority students, particularly Hispanics, statistical tests indicate

that the differences shown in Table 2.1 are reliable, that is, reflect true differences between these groups in their support of cultural pluralism.

TABLE 2.1

EDUCATIONAL PLURALISM BY RACE/ETHNICITY

Race/Ethnicity	Average Pluralism Score	Total N
White/Caucasian	2.25	1781
Hispanic/Chicano	2.47	15
Black	2.79	52

TABLE 2.2

PREFERENCE FOR NEIGHBORHOOD SCHOOLS BY RACE/ETHNICITY

Race/Ethnicity	% Prefer Neighborhood Schools	% Prefer Integration	% Don't Know	Total N
White/Caucasian	68.5	18.3	12.9	1780
Hispanic/Chicano	86.7	6.7	6.7	15
Black	49.1	40.4	10.5	57

Interestingly, the two minority groups have very different attitudes toward neighborhood schools as opposed to desegregation (See Table 2.2).

While White/Caucasians show a strong support of neighborhood schools (68.5 percent), Hispanic/Chicanos show even greater preference for neighborhood schools (86.7 percent). A slight majority of Blacks who responded also preferred neighborhood schools, but a significant percentage (40.4 percent) support integration when compared to both Hispanics and Whites.

This association between race/ethnicity and support of neighborhood schools may not be as confusing as suggested at first glance. Desegregation programs in areas with large Hispanic populations have been perceived by Spanish-speaking populations as a threat to the bi-lingual, bi-cultural community centers which often operate through the neighborhood schools. Hispanic students who are reassigned to desegregated schools may not have access to the culturally pluralistic curricula available in their own neighborhood schools. In general, the Hispanic population reflects the perception among many Nebraskans that cultural pluralism and desegregation processes are not synonymous.

Effects of Education

A chief determinant of educational attitudes is the respondent's own educational level: the higher the educational level, the more liberal the attitudes toward educational issues. An explicit goal of many liberal arts educational institutions is the cultivation within students of "...a pluralistic outlook by helping them to acquire a knowledge of national and ethnic minorities other than their own."* General evidence that

*"Nature and objectives of liberal education," University of Nebraska, Lincoln. Approved by the faculty, April 26, 1979.

education is related to cultural pluralism attitudes can be seen in Table 3.1. Respondents holding bachelor's and master's degrees show the highest support of cultural pluralism. Interestingly, the lowest average scores are found among junior college degree holders and those respondents with less than a high school degree. Note, however, that the attitudes of high school graduates are not all that different from these groups.

TABLE 3.1

EDUCATIONAL PLURALISM SCORES BY EDUCATIONAL DEGREE

Degree Completed	Average Educational Pluralism Score	Total N
Less than high school	1.90	402
High school	2.28	1123
Junior college	2.17	87
Bachelor's degree	2.65	207
Master's degree	2.60	82

TABLE 3.2

PREFERENCE FOR NEIGHBORHOOD SCHOOLS BY EDUCATIONAL DEGREE

Degree Completed	% Prefer Neighborhood Schools	% Prefer Integration	% Don't Know	Total N
Less than high school	60.9	10.8	27.3	403
High school	70.6	19.3	9.4	1126
Junior college	75.0	6.8	15.9	87
Bachelor's degree	62.8	28.5	8.7	207
Master's degree	56.1	35.4	8.5	82

Support for the integration of schools also is found to vary by educational level among Nebraskans. Fewer than 11 percent of the respondents with less than a high school degree or a junior college degree believe that integration is the preferable way to achieve equal educational opportunities for minorities. It should be noted that these two groups also had sizeable percentages of respondents who did not know whether they preferred integration or neighborhood schools. In contrast, approximately one-third of those with a bachelor's or master's degree preferred integration as the better model for achieving equal educational opportunities.

Effects of Age

Respondent age is significantly related to both pluralism attitudes

and preference for neighborhood schools. Respondents in the 41 to 96 year age groups had average educational pluralism scale scores that were substantially lower than other age groups. In addition, support for integrating schools was lowest in those age groups above 40.

TABLE 4.1

EDUCATIONAL PLURALISM SCORES BY AGE

Age Category	Average Educational Pluralism Score	Total N
17 thru 25	2.65	327
26 thru 40	2.45	582
41 thru 55	2.17	382
56 thru 75	1.98	455
76 thru 96	1.61	152

TABLE 4.2

PREFERENCE FOR NEIGHBORHOOD SCHOOLS BY AGE

Age Category	% Prefer Neighborhood Schools	% Prefer Integration	% Don't Know	Total N
17 thru 25	67.3	28.1	4.6	327
26 thru 40	69.6	24.1	6.3	582
41 thru 55	73.2	16.8	10.0	381
56 thru 75	67.9	9.9	22.2	455
76 thru 96	47.4	9.9	42.7	152

These three highest age groups formed a homogeneous set of responses distinct from the 17 through 40 age groups. In general, respondents below the age of 40 are more likely to indicate a preference for one program over the other, and they are more likely to support integration than those in the above-40 categories.

Effects of Residence

The average educational pluralism score of Lincoln respondents is significantly higher than the scores of other Nebraskans, both rural and urban. The desegregation program enacted in the Omaha public schools has generated a state-wide interest in these issues.

TABLE 5.1

EDUCATIONAL PLURALISM SCORES BY RESIDENCE

Residence	Average Educational Pluralism Score	Total N
Rural-farm	2.26	246
Rural-non-farm	2.27	146
Urban (excluding Lincoln, Omaha)	2.22	877
Lincoln	2.38	189
Omaha	2.22	445

In general, Nebraskans strongly prefer the improvement of neighborhood schools over the desegregation of students as a policy for equalizing

educational opportunities for minorities. Omaha residents showed a lower percentage of approval of desegregation and a significantly higher approval of the neighborhood school than any other population group. Residents of Lincoln and rural non-farm areas show a slightly greater preference for integration than residents of other urban and rural areas.

TABLE 5.2

PREFERENCE FOR NEIGHBORHOOD SCHOOLS BY RESIDENCE

Residence	% Prefer Neighborhood	% Prefer Integration	% Don't Know	Total N
Rural-farm	66.3	18.7	15.0	246
Rural-non-farm	69.9	22.6	7.5	146
Urban (excluding Lincoln, Omaha)	65.0	18.7	16.3	876
Lincoln	61.4	21.7	16.9	189
Omaha	76.0	16.2	7.8	445

It should be noted that the desegregation question does not refer to the process of bussing itself. Only in larger cities would integration mean bussing or the movement of students due to residential segration. In non-metropolitan areas high schools often serve an entire county and thus are "naturally" integrated to the extent that minorities live in and attend schools in those counties.

CONCLUSIONS

In sum, the Nebraska Annual Social Indicators Survey shows strong support of cultural pluralism among Nebraskans, the great majority agreeing that schools should take into account the cultural backgrounds of children in setting rules determining curriculum, should include discussions of race relations and encourage students of varying skills. As expected, these attitudes were strongest among minority racial and ethnic groups, younger respondents, and those with advanced educational degrees. Rural-urban differences were not evident in these attitudes although there is evidence that the Lincoln residents have higher approval of cultural pluralism than other Nebraska urban or rural residents.

It is not surprising that the particular history of desegregation programs in the Omaha schools has set this population of respondents apart from other Nebraskans in their preference for neighborhood schools. The finding that this preference is also shared by Chicano/Hispanic residents of the state, but is not shared by Blacks, is important to note. The specific needs of distinct minority ethnic groups are differentially served, or at least viewed, by integration efforts to improve equal educational opportunities. These data on educational attitudes indicate that Nebraskans hold highly pluralistic attitudes, but are generally unwilling to change the traditional neighborhood school in order to meet the cultural differences of ethnic and racial minority groups.

List of reports already released using data gathered in the 1980 Nebraska Annual Social Indicators Survey. These may be purchased at the indicated price from the Bureau of Sociological Research of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

Report Number	Title
1.	Designs, Procedures, Instruments and Forms for the 1980 NASIS. Lynn K. White. Price: $7.50.
2.	Status of Women in Nebraska. Susan Welch and Alan Booth. Price: $1.00.
3.	Congressional District and Planning Region Databook for the State of Nebraska. Lynn K. White. Price: $1.50.
4.	Nebraskans and Their Local Government. Susan Welch and Alan Booth. Price: $ .75.
5.	Migration in Nebraska: Movers and Stayers 1977-79. Lynn K. White. Price: $ .75.
6.	Nebraskans and Their University. David Brinkerhoff and Alan Booth. Price: $ .75.

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NEBRASKANS AND STATE WATER POLICY: AN UPDATE

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Bureau of Sociological Research
Department of Sociology
University of Nebraska–Lincoln
Lincoln, Nebraska 68588
Telephone: (402) 472-3672

NASIS-80 #8

NEBRASKANS AND STATE WATER POLICY: AN UPDATE

Susan Welch
Department of Political Science

Price: .75

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Lynn K. White - 1980 Study Director

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NEBRASKANS AND STATE WATER POLICY: AN UPDATE.*

Introduction

Last year in two NASIS reports, we reported some findings about the views of the Nebraska public toward regulation of water in the state. The following report updates and expands those findings. In particular, we will examine the following questions: Has there been any changes in public attitudes toward water regulation? Which kinds of water regulatory activities are given the highest public priority? How much do Nebraskans know about and participate in the activities of Natural Resource Districts? and What does the public think about ownership of groundwater in the state?

The responses to these questions were measured in the 1979 and 1980 Nebraska Annual Social Indicators Survey (NASIS). In each year, a sample of over 1900 randomly selected adult Nebraskans were contacted in a statewide telephone survey. Half were asked about their opinions concerning water policy in Nebraska. The responses below can be considered accurate to within five percent of the true value--the responses that would be given if every adult Nebraskan were queried.

Natural Resource Districts (NRDs)

There are 24 regional Natural Resource Districts in the State of

*Support for this project was provided in part by the office of Water Research and Technology, U.S. Department of the Interior, under the Public Law 88-379 Program.

Nebraska. Regionally elected representatives to the NRDs have authority from the state legislature to do some kinds of regulation of water. Yet, despite the fact that the NRDs have been in existence since 1972, that in some areas of the state they have held public hearings on water shortages, and that they are the primary existing water regulatory bodies, substantial numbers of Nebraskans have never heard of them. Table 1 shows that about 40 percent say they have heard of NRDs, another 18 percent think they have, and slightly over 40 percent say they have no knowledge of NRDs. In 1979 only 21 percent said they had ever voted for a member of the NRD board, and in 1980 we find that only slightly more than 10 percent of the public think they know the names of their NRD board members. On the other hand, it should be noted that the only item comparable in both years shows an apparent slight increase in awareness over the past year. Table 1 shows a jump from 30 to 39 percent, in percent who had heard of NRDs--an increase which is just beyond sampling error.

Thus, we may conclude that even though NRDs have been given some important water regulatory functions by state government, they operate far from the public spotlight, and hence far from public control. One caveat to this generalization, however, is that NRDs are better-known in rural areas, where their decisions are more directly salient, than in the Lincoln and Omaha areas where the problems concerning water are not so immediate.

Strategies for Controlling Water Use

In both 1979 and 1980 respondents were asked whether they favor

regulation of water used in households, agriculture, or business and industry. Results from both years (see Table 2) indicate that, while more than two-thirds of the public favor water regulation for business and agriculture, a significantly smaller proportion favor regulation for private household use.

While this generalization holds for both the 1979 and 1980 sample, there are some changes evident in Table 2. Percent favoring agricultural regulation (67 percent) stayed remarkably constant over the one-year period, but public support for both private household regulation and business regulation declined by 9-10 percentage points. This decrease in support is too large to be attributed to sampling error and appears to represent a real decrease in public support for these forms of water regulation. One possible reason for the decline is the lack of drought conditions throughout the Summer, Fall, and Winter of 1979. One might suppose that support for water regulation (at least of someone else's water) increases directly as water shortages increase.

When asked to determine which of five strategies for control of water use would be <u>most</u> preferred in case of drought, the most popular form of regulation is that of business and industry (37%) followed by the regulation of agriculture (24%). An approximately equal number (17%) favor controlling water use by increasing its price and regulating household water use. Only a small proportion (5%) would give priority to encouraging people to move away from water-short areas.

There are some differences among groups favoring each water-control alternative. In general, the greater the education, the more support is

voiced for decreasing water use through increasing cost. As education is highly related to income, this preference is probably related to the greater ability of the highly educated to pay for higher water costs. Those at the lower educational levels are more likely than others to favor regulation of agricultural water use and are not too different from other groups in their views about private and industrial water use and encouraging people to move away from water-short areas.

Older people tend to favor regulations for private and agricultural use more than younger people, while younger people are more predisposed to make increasing water costs and regulation of business water use their top priorities. Reasons for these differences are not immediately apparent.

There are some slight differences in water regulation priority by the respondents' residences. Citizens from the North are most likely, and those from Omaha and the Panhandle least likely to favor regulation of agriculture water use. Interestingly, aside from Omaha, there appears to be no differences between farm and urban dwellers in support for water regulation in agriculture.

Attitudes Toward the Legal Status of Groundwater

In Nebraska, the public has rights to water above ground, but groundwater has always been considered the property of those whose land lies above the water. This legal status has made it more difficult for the state to contemplate regulation of groundwater than surface water. Table 4 presents finding from our survey showing that, while over three times as